

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 0180

EXDIS

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, IS, EG, JO, XF, US
SUBJ: FUTURE ISRAELI PLANS FOR SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED
TERRITORIES

1. USING THE OCCASION OF A MEETING WITH BEGIN AND DAYAN JANUARY 5 ON ANOTHER SUBJECT, I ASKED FOR SOME CLARIFICATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S FUTURE SETTLEMENT PLANS IN LIGHT OF CONFLICTING PRESS REPORTS DURING THE PAST FEW DAYS. BEGIN OBLIGINGLY SUGGESTED THAT DAYAN RESPOND. DAYAN SAID THAT THE BEGIN PEACE PROPOSALS HAD CREATED VERY GREAT WORRIES AMONG THE SETTLERS IN SINAI IN PARTICULAR. HE AND SHARON HAD SPOKEN TO A SETTLERS' RALLY AT YAMIT LAST SUNDAY AFTERNOON AND FOUND IT VERY TOUGH GOING INDEED. THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF WORRY ABOUT THE FUTURE AMONG PEOPLE WHO HAD GONE TO THESE OUTLYING AREAS ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THEY WOULD ALWAYS BE UNDER THE PROTECTION OF ISRAELI
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FORCES.

2. AS REGARDS THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS, DAYAN CONFIRMED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WISHES TO "FILL IN THE GAPS" AMONG EXISTING SETTLEMENTS IN ORDER TO HAVE A THICKER, MORE COMPACT, BODY OF SETTLERS IN PLACE FOR REASSURANCE TO EACH OTHER THAT THEIR SECURITY WILL BE PROTECTED.

TODAY'S JERUSALEM POST REPORT ABOUT NEW SETTLEMENTS PLANNED EAST OF EL-ARISH AND ALREADY INDEED UNDER FIRST PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION WAS ESSENTIALLY CORRECT, DAYAN SAID. THERE IS NO PLAN TO ESTABLISH SETTLEMENTS ANY CLOSER TO EL-ARISH, BUT TO FILL IN GAPS EAST OF EL-ARISH.

3. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUERY, DAYAN AND BEGIN BOTH SAID THEY DID NOT BELIEVE THIS ACTION WOULD COMPLICATE THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EGYPTIANS. IT WOULD, HOWEVER, REASSURE THE SETTLERS THAT ISRAEL WAS NOT ABANDONING THEIR INTERESTS AT THIS STAGE. BEGIN STRESSED THE SMALL AREA OF THE TOTAL SINAI INVOLVED AND THE DEEP HISTORIC COMMITMENT ISRAEL HAD TO THOSE WHO HAD SETTLED THE LAND ON ITS BEHALF. HE REMINDED ME OF THE PROPOSAL FOR THE SINAI WHICH IS NOW BEFORE THE EGYPTIANS, UNDER WHICH SOVEREIGNTY WOULD BE EGYPTIAN THROUGHOUT THE SINAI BUT THE SETTLERS WOULD BE PERMITTED TO REMAIN WITH SOME SPECIAL PERSONAL LINKS TO THE ISRAELI COURT SYSTEM AND PROTECTION FROM SOME SORT OF LOCAL DEFENSE FORCES AND UN FORCES, AT LEAST FOR A TIME. HE SAID THAT THEY WOULD HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE THE EGYPTIAN REACTION, BUT ANY DECISION TO PULL OUT THE SETTLERS OR TO ABANDON THEM WHOLLY WOULD BE EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT FOR HIS GOVERNMENT OR FOR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT. IN ANSWER TO ANOTHER QUESTION, CONFIDENTIAL

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BEGIN SAID HE REALLY HAD NO REACTION THUS FAR FROM SADAT TO THAT PORTION OF THE ISRAELI PROPOSALS.

4. WITH REGARD TO THE WEST BANK, DAYAN AND BEGIN BOTH REAFFIRMED THE DECISION TAKEN EARLIER LAST FALL TO LIMIT NEW SETTLEMENTS TO A HANDFUL, AND IN WHICH THE SETTLERS WOULD GO INTO EXISTING MILITARY CAMP AREAS. THERE ARE APPARENTLY PROPOSALS NOW BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT FOR A NUMBER OF ADDITIONAL SUCH SITES. DAYAN SAID THEY ARE BEING STUDIED AND THAT IF APPROPRIATE MILITARY CAMPS ARE LOCATED THAT PERHAPS THREE MORE SETTLEMENTS MIGHT BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THOSE CAMPS WITHIN THE NEXT THREE MONTHS. HE AND BEGIN BOTH CONFIRMED THAT GOVERNMENT POLICY REMAINS THE SAME, THAT DURING THE PERIOD OF NEGOTIATIONS NOW UNDERWAY, ALL NEW SETTLEMENTS IN THE WEST BANK WOULD BE CONFINED WITHIN EXISTING ISRAELI MILITARY FACILITIES. BEGIN ALSO SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THERE MIGHT BE SOME NEW SETTLERS GOING INTO EXISTING SETTLEMENTS AS WELL TO INCREASE THEIR POPULATION SLIGHTLY, ESPECIALLY IN CASES OF SMALL, WEAK, EXISTING SETTLEMENTS. HE REMINDED ME THAT THIS IDEA OF INCREASING THE SIZE OF EXISTING SETTLEMENTS HAD BEEN

DISCUSSED IN WASHINGTON LAST AUGUST.

5. COMMENT: THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN TAKING QUITE A BEATING THE LAST FEW DAYS OVER THE PROPOSALS TO WITHDRAW TOTALLY IN SINAI AND LEAVE THE SETTLERS HIGH AND DRY. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID TO ME AT THE END OF THIS CONVERSATION THAT THE FUTURE OF THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI IS THE MOST DIFFICULT SINGLE ISSUE REMAINING BETWEEN THE EGYPTIANS AND THE ISRAELIS FOR RESOLUTION, AND IT OBVIOUSLY PRESENTS SUBSTANTIAL PROBLEMS POLITICALLY. THE SETTLEMENT PLANS DESCRIBED ABOVE ARE CLEARLY IN THE NATURE OF A POLITICAL PALLIATIVE TO TRY TO DIFFUSE SOME OF THE OPPOSITION. HOWEVER, THEY ALSO REPRESENT A SERIOUS EFFORT, I THINK, TO
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LEAVE AN ISRAELI CITIZEN NUCLEUS OF A RESPECTABLE SIZE SEPARATING THE GAZA STRIP FROM EGYPT AND THE SINAI. BEGIN CONFIRMED AS MUCH TO ME WHEN I RAISED THIS POINT.
LEWIS

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